

*Writing With Ease and Writing With Skill:*  
Susan's Updated Recommendations

In 2008, Well-Trained Mind Press began publishing *Writing With Ease*, which fleshes out the general elementary writing recommendations in *The Well-Trained Mind* into a full curriculum. *Writing With Skill*, which does the same for the logic stage (pre-rhetoric recommendations), followed.

We've been fortunate that many thousands of parents have made use of these programs--and have given us plenty of feedback about their experience. Here are three things I've learned...

### **You'll Probably Need to Repeat the Dictations More Than Three Times**

Throughout *Writing With Ease*, I suggest that you repeat dictation sentences three times. If a student can hold the dictations in his head after three repetitions, that's great. Ideal, in fact

But as we all know, "ideal" isn't "real." Many students need additional repetitions. And as you get into the more complex dictations, *most* students will need you to say the dictation sentences additional times.

That's absolutely fine. Don't frustrate your young writer. Repeat the sentences again. And, if necessary, again. And again. BUT, follow these two rules...

- 1) Always ask the student to repeat the sentence back to you before she goes back to writing.
- 2) Always repeat the dictation assignment from the beginning. Don't allow the student to write one word at a time as you "feed" the sentence to her.

### **Three Levels of *Writing With Ease* is Enough**

The purpose of the readings, narrations, and dictations in *Writing With Ease* is to develop critical skills in writing--putting ideas into words, getting words down on paper, and holding words in your head long enough to write them out. (If you're not familiar with the need for these skills, be sure to read my short essay ["Why Writing Programs Fail."](#))

For most students, those skills are in place by the end of *Writing With Ease, Level Three*. In fact, many students who are perfectly ready to go on to original writing (the next step in the process) are frustrated by the more complex sentences in our original Level Four--particularly the dictation exercises.

So we suggest that you complete *Writing With Ease* 1-3, and then follow one of the options in the chart below, keeping this last point in mind...

### **Fifth Grade is Generally Too Early for *Writing With Skill***

*Writing With Skill* is one very specific, parts-to-whole, step-by-step outworking of the principles laid out in my writing workshops (such as this one: ["A Plan For Teaching Writing: Middle Grades"](#)) It is a *pre-rhetoric* course, designed to give students the skills necessary to 1) compose well-organized, properly researched and documented short pieces of expository writing across the curriculum, and 2) prepare them to go into a high school or freshman college

rhetoric course.

So, although it is the next logical step after *Writing With Ease* in the student's writing development, it doesn't necessarily have to be completed *immediately* after the *Writing With Ease* series. In fact, most students seem to benefit from a year or more of writing across the curriculum or using another writing program. This additional maturity reduces frustration levels, makes the texts used in *Writing With Skill* more accessible, and still gets the student ready for rhetoric in plenty of time.

Here are a few possible scenarios that you might follow...all of them completely compatible with the writing goals I discuss in my workshops. (Please note that I'm not necessarily making full endorsements and recommendations of the listed curricula—simply trying to give you a sense of how a number of different progressions can get a student to high school rhetoric in time.)

<b>GRADE</b>	<b>First Scenario</b>	<b>Second Scenario</b>	<b>Third Scenario</b>	<b>Fourth Scenario</b>
First	Writing With Ease 1	Writing With Ease 1		
Second	Writing With Ease 2	Writing With Ease 2	Writing With Ease 1	Writing With Ease 1
Third	Writing With Ease 3	Writing With Ease 3	Writing With Ease 2	Writing With Ease 2
<b>GRADE</b>	<b>First Scenario</b>	<b>Second Scenario</b>	<b>Third Scenario</b>	<b>Fourth Scenario</b>
Fourth	Continue narrations and summaries across the curriculum	Kilgallon, Sentence Composing for Middle School	Writing With Ease 3	Writing With Ease 3

Fifth	Continue narrations and summaries across the curriculum	Killgallon, Paragraph Composing for Middle School	Writing With Skill 1, half speed	Bravewriter course
Sixth	Writing With Skill 1	Killgallon, Sentence Composing for High School	Writing With Skill 1, half speed	Bravewriter course
Seventh	Writing With Skill 2	Writing With Skill 1	Writing With Skill 2, half speed	Follow TWTM recommendations for outlining, summarizing, etc.
Eighth	Writing With Skill 3	Writing With Skill 2	Writing With Skill 2, half speed	Writing With Skill 1
Ninth	Continue to write short researched compositions across the curriculum	Writing With Skill 3	Writing With Skill 3	Writing With Skill 2
Tenth	Gerald Graff and Cathy Birkenstein, <i>They Say, I Say: The Moves that Matter in Academic Writing</i> and <i>Schaum's Quick Guide to Writing Great Research Papers</i> , plus regular persuasive papers across the curriculum	Well-Trained Mind Academy Rhetoric 1	Classical Academic Press, Writing & Rhetoric, Books 7, 8, 9	Writing With Skill 3
Eleventh	Frank D'Angelo, <i>Composition in the Classical Tradition</i> , plus regular persuasive papers across the curriculum	Well-Trained Mind Academy Rhetoric 2	Classical Academic Press, Writing & Rhetoric, Books 10, 11, 12	Well-Trained Mind Academy Rhet

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<b>GRADE</b>	<b>First Scenario</b>	<b>Second Scenario</b>	<b>Third Scenario</b>	<b>Fourth Scenario</b>
Twelfth	Thomas Kane, <i>The New Oxford Guide to Writing</i> plus regular persuasive papers across the curriculum	Advanced writing or literature elective	Thomas Kane, <i>The New Oxford Guide to Writing</i> plus regular persuasive papers across the curriculum	Well-Trained Mind Academy Rhetoric 2